

The Things We Do...The Mistakes We Make

by Illyandria V

Category: Xena: Warrior Princess

Genre: Romance

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2000-06-29 08:00:00

Updated: 2000-06-29 08:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 20:37:44

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 11,552

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: The scrolls of Urania have been stolen, and Ares was asked to put his best warrior on it...

The Things We Do...The Mistakes We Make

~*~

>
Title: The Things We Do...The Mistakes We Make

>
Author: Illyandria

>
Disclaimer: Xena, Ares, Pompey, and all other characters that appear in the syndicated series Xena: Warrior Princess are property of MCA, Universal, and Renaissance Pictures. No copyright infringement intended. However, two characters so far DO belong to me. Astralique and Kinshasa. Don't even think about stealing them without my permission! And the portrayal of Urania is mine, I guess, but Urania is a character out of mythology.

>
Violence/Sex/Profanity: Profanity, and a bit of violence...and sex, but not *really* explicit.

>
Rating: PG-13

>
Dedication: To Sarah, Kat, Sara, and Jo.

>
Author's Note: This story was co-written by Barb more or less. Thanks Barb! Takes place in the third season, right after "When In Rome..." Ares has long hair, Gabby and Xena have not been in India, and Pompey and Caesar aren't dead. This story might be a bit more...uh...bold than my others! ;-) Anyway, I hope you enjoy it! Please, I beg of you, write me an e-mail and tell me if you enjoy it! Even a word, I don't care! Please?!

>
~*~

>

>

>
Studying the army in the valley below her, she sighed. Though it was not the army that made her sigh, it was an ever-so-familiar presence that was irking her.

>
"Come on out," she purred.

>
As he stepped out of the ether, he smirked. Glancing down at the army, he asked, "So, are you having fun with my new warlord?"

>
She glared in his direction. "This is *your* warlord?"
>
He shrugged. "Well, he *thinks* he is, though he really doesn't have my favor... However," he grinned slyly, "there's one about fifteen miles from here that *does* have my favor...though not as much as you do..." He placed a hand at the side of her face, caressing the skin and toying with her hair.
>
"Could've fooled me," she retorted, sharply turning her head away from his hand.
>
He pouted, stepping closer.
>
"What do you want?" she snapped out before he could even say a word.
>
"So straight to the point, my princess," he murmured. "I'm here to ask you a favor, actually." When he saw she was about to say something to that, he said quickly, "Just hear me out, alright?"

>
She gave him a distrustful look, but relented, nodding her head for him to continue.
>
"It's about Pompey --" he started, but was cut off.
>
"Oh. I heard he was in India looking for something. What's he doing there? Caesar has been getting too high and mighty in his absence."
>
"Yeah, that's right. He's in India right now, and Caesar is becoming powerful enough to present a problem..."
>
"Well, what's he doing in India, Ares?" Xena asked impatiently.

>
"He's searching for the scrolls of Urania. They -- hey, you know who she is, right?"
>
Xena nodded. "Yes. Urania, one of the Muses, goddess of...astronomy?"
>
"Correct. Well, the scrolls of Urania talk about stars and such. One of the scrolls holds a spell. It's...well, you have to be at a certain spot when the moon is in a certain place...you say the spell, and you're supposed to be granted one wish. But when a mortal got hold of the spell and tried it for the first time...that mortal was destroyed. There was something wrong with the spell; Urania had somehow unintentionally altered it. So she hid the spells," he laughed bitterly a little, "And her apprentice - some stupid mortal man - helped her to hide them. But he - like I said, he was *stupid* - drew a map to find them again. He figured that when *he* spoke the spell he'd get a wish out of it, and not be destroyed. Again, he was stupid, and extremely greedy. Anyway, when he was traveling to India to get the spells back, he was murdered, and others got a hold of the map. Somehow, one way or another, Pompey got a hold of it."

>
"Let me guess," Xena cut in again. "You want me to take the map from Pompey and destroy it before he finds his death in India, right?"
>
Ares nodded.
>
"Why? Why would *you* want me to save *Pompey*?"
>
Ares sighed. "Urania asked me to get the map back for her. She doesn't want millions of people getting their hands on it and killing themselves. She asked me if I would have my best warrior return the map for her. And you, my sweet, are my best warrior."
>
"Why not just do it yourself, hmm?"
>
"I *can't* do it myself, number one. Gods aren't supposed to be involved with affairs like this. Some stupid rule that Zeus made. That's why Urania asked me to put my best warrior on it - not *me*. And you wouldn't *just* be doing me a favor... You don't want Pompey dead. If he's killed, then Caesar will take over Rome. So you can't

let Pompey die, right?"

>
"Perhaps..." Xena said. "I could handle him dying though, but I'd prefer him to stay alive..."

>
"Don't be so stubborn."

>
"Oh, I'll save Pompey...but if I do, you have to do something for me."

>
"Oh? And what's that?" Ares asked.

>
"You have to promise me that you'll start no wars, no chaos, no anything while I'm gone. And you have to get rid of this warlord, and the other one. Okay?"

>
Ares nodded. "Anything for you."

>
"Oh, and one more tiny thing..."

>
He arched an eyebrow.

>
"Get a hair cut."

>
He pouted. "Don't you like it?"

>
Xena had a disgusted look on her face as she replied, "No!" Her look of disgust began to change to one of seductive perusal, as she said, "I liked it when it was shorter...you looked kind of..." she ran her tongue along her upper lip, "sexy...it went so much better with that outfit, too...the tight leather stretching over your chest...and those silver rivets glinting in the sunlight..." She began daydreaming as her eyes raked over his body. "Those big...brown eyes...strong hands...muscles...bulging... all over. -"

>
Ares had arched an eyebrow, and now stopped her in mid-sentence. "Whoa, Sweetheart, hold up there, far enough. I'm starting to get the impression that you don't quite hate me?"

>
Xena shook her head, trying to clear her mind of the daze she had been in. What did she say! "Oh, I don't exactly hate you..."

I...uh...put up with you. Yeah that's it I put up with you."

>
"From the way you were going on, Xe, I'd say you *more* than put up with me... I mean, it sounded like you wouldn't mind 'knowing' me better than I know myself!" He grinned wickedly.

>
She closed her eyes briefly. "Don't go there, Ares. I don't hate you, I tolerate you. End of story."

>
~*~

>
"So, have you figured anything out yet, Sweet? A cover-up?"

>
Xena nodded. "It's pathetic, but it should work."

>
"Well, what is it?"

>
"Well, you," she waved her hands in the air indicating the way he usually transported around, "me over to India, over to Pompey. I tell him that I came because I heard about what he was after, the story behind it, and all that. I tell him that I wanted to make sure that the wish he's gonna make is going to somehow get rid of Caesar. Pompey knows I hate him. And I'll also tell Pompey I want to help him find the scrolls, and he'll have to agree. He knows that I'm smart."

>
"Sounds alright. Not your best though, dear," Ares said quirked that eyebrow again. "Pompey hasn't really gotten anywhere, so he'll buy the thing about you helping for sure."

>
"Alright then."

>
"How would you like to arrive in India? Big entrance, surprise entrance, what?"

>
Xena grinned. "I think I'll have you take me there when he's out digging. He's staying at a palace, right? Well, when he's gone, I'll go to the palace, and have them let me in. I'll just be sitting in the throne room when he comes back. Surprise him a bit, okay?"

>
"Okay. And what would you like to wear? I'm guessing you're

gonna seduce him, right? If you're doing that you need to look...sexy..." he paused, "though I personally think you look magnificent in whatever you're wearing."

>
His last sentence lingered in her mind, but she acted as if she'd dismissed it, and said, "Yeah, I'll need a dress."

>
He took her hand and led her to the closet. He stepped inside, and soon came out holding a purple dress. It was short and looked like something an exotic princess would wear. Only two thin straps held the dress to her, which went around the back of her neck and were to be tied. The skirt was loose and silky, and there were purple sandals to match.

>
"Is this okay?"

>
She nodded, and looked up at him for a moment.

>
"So shoot me I have a few things here just in case you return," Ares coughed.

>
She started to take off her armor. Soon her breastplate and gauntlets were laying on the bed. She took off her boots, and then proceeded to remove her leathers.

>
When she was done, and standing naked before him, she caught the look in his eyes. It was one she had seen before. Pure lust.

>
Ares desperately repressed the desire to throw her onto the thickly feather ticked bed and make love to her like he knew only he could. Her body was beautiful...no, that would be the understatement. She was perfection. He felt his leather pants becoming even tighter at the thoughts swirling about his head.

>
Shaking his head he finally got a hold of himself and lifted his eyes, only to her staring at him.

>
"You seem to like what you see," she said, laughing a little.

>
"Oh gods," he groaned out loud. "Don't you know it?" he said, voice straining, and he handed her the dress.

>
She put it on, and motioned for him to tie the back for her.

>
He walked around her and took the thin straps in his hands, tying them. It took all his godly reserves to tie those damn straps when all he wanted to do was slowly lower them from her soft inviting shoulders. At last though he was finished, but he couldn't help himself. His hands just happened to find themselves around her waist, his head cocked to the side in a predatory manner, his lips inches from her silky neck. He chanced it. He dipped his head a little further, his tongue languidly sliding along the base of her neck. His groan of desire wafted into her ear.

>
She closed her eyes and tilted her head to the other side, allowing him easy access. She let out a soft moan as the god behind her licked, kissed, and nipped at her neck.

>
But finally, she had to move away, before it went to far. And she knew it would soon, if she let it continue, for everything with Ares moved fast. "Ares, stop. Stop," she said softly, pulling away.

>
He turned her around in his arms to face him, his eyes boring into hers. There was need there...a frantic need...

>
She shook her head. "I'm sorry. Not now. I can't.

Please...please understand, Ares."

>
The lust went out of his eyes slowly as he shrugged. "I suppose there will be time enough for that later, right?" he asked with a wicked grin.

>
She arched an eyebrow and gave him a half hearted grin. "Right."

>
~*~

>
"What do you mean our tunnels have caved in?!" Pompey asked angrily.
>
His second-in-command bowed nervously. "Something jarred the supports and now the tunnels have collapsed."
>
Pompey closed his eyes and shook his head, running his fingers through his short blonde hair. He mumbled
>something about stupid useless morons and then looked back up at the soldier. "Very well. You'll just have to fix it. Dig the tunnels again."

>The soldier bowed again. "Yes, my lord." He exited the tent.

>Nobody noticed the black cat standing regally in a dark corner.

>~*~

>Xena and Ares appeared at the edge of the forest nearby the palace.

>He looked at her. "Ready?"

>She nodded. "Yes. But..."

>He arched an inquiring eyebrow. "What is it?"

>"Well...I might get...bored... You are planning on appearing every so often? To talk or something like that? About the plans?" she hesitated.

>"Why, Xena, do you *want* me to appear?"

>She glared at him. "All I'm saying is I *could* get bored and I'd like someone here to entertain me."

>"Oh, but I can do so much *more* than *entertain*..."

>She sighed. "You're so-"

>"Charming? Clever? Sweet? Sexy?"

>"Impossible! Just go away, alright? I'm going up to the palace." She turned away from him and walked up to the palace gates.

>He grinned after her and called seductively into the air, "Good luck, My Princess. And don't you worry, I will be visiting you!"

>She kept her back towards him so that he didn't see the smile cross her face.

>~*~

>"Halt! Who are you?" the guard asked as she approached the palace door.

>"My name is Xena," she replied.

>"State your business."

>"I'm here to see Pompey. I -"

>"What for?"

>"Business matters. Believe me, he will be *very* happy to see me."

>The guard looked her over, debating whether or not he should let her inside.

>Xena saw this and stated, "I'm an old friend of Pompey's, and if he was here right now, he would tell you to let me inside and find me a place to stay. If he were here right now, he'd tell you that I am an honored guest. Now,*please*, let me through. You wouldn't want Pompey angered now would you."

>The guard shrugged, and stepped aside. "As you wish, milady. Go straight down the hallway and stop at the first door on your right. You'll find a servant there that will show you your quarters."

>Xena nodded and went through the door. Walking down the hallway, she did as the guard said, and stopped at the first door on the right.

>A girl, apparently in her teens, immediately came up to her. "What can I do for you, milady?"

>"What is your name, dear?" Xena asked.

>"Kinshasa, milady."

>"Kinshasa, would you mind showing me around the palace, and showing me my quarters?"

>"Of course, milady. Come with me." Kinshasa walked down the hallway with Xena beside her. She showed Xena every room they passed, until Xena got tired.

>"Kinshasa?" Xena asked.

>"Yes, milady?"

>"In this palace, is there a throne room, or a room in which Pompey always goes through? A large room, perchance?"

>"Yes, milady. We call it the ballroom, and from there you can reach the guest's quarters and Pompey's bedroom."

>Thoughts churned through Xena's mind. "Could you show it to me, please?"

>"Yes, milady, follow me." She opened a pair of large doors, and gestured for Xena to enter.

>It was an incredibly large room with tables and beds of pillows and food all over the place. At the head of the room there was a canopy-type bed with a bunch of pillows on top.

>"Is that where Pompey and his most royal guests sit at the parties?" Xena asked.

>"Yes, milady. And the hallway to our right leads to the bedchambers."

>"Okay. Thank you, Kinshasa. You've been very helpful. Now all I need to know is where I'm supposed to stay, and that will be all."

>"Go all the way down that long hallway. At the very end you will see large double doors. That is where Pompey
sleeps. The door left of that can be your room."

>
"Thank you, Kinshasa, that will be all for now."

>
Kinshasa nodded, bowed, and then left.

>
Xena walked around the room, studying it carefully. It was large, but not too large, so if she...sat on the canopied couch or whatever the hell that thing was supposed to be, Pompey would be sure to see her there. She sighed and walked over to it. She ran a hand over the pillows for a moment, and then sat down on them. Thinking for a moment, trying to come up with the best position to show her incredible attributes as she sat, she decided on something not all that bad. Stacking a couple pillows so that they were a bit higher than the rest of the couch, she sat atop those. She leaned back on her hands and crossed her legs in front of her.

>
"That'll work, I suppose," she muttered to herself, and then reached over to pick up a bowl of fruit. Sitting it in front of her, she picked up a grape and slowly ate it.

>
"Oh, this is going to be a piece of cake..."

>
Seemingly out of nowhere, a sleek black cat appeared. It jumped up on the couch and rubbed it's face against her leg.

>
Xena reached down and pet it. "Aren't you sweet..."

>
The cat purred in answer, its emerald eyes staring up at her.

>
~*~

>
Ten grapes, two kiwis, and a mango later, Xena finally heard something outside the door. A banging, and then Pompey's voice.

>
"Well, it's about time he showed up," she murmured, and then resumed her position, leaning back on her hands luxuriously, a beautiful smile on her face.

>
A moment later, Pompey burst into the room, slamming the door behind him. He made his way to a window opposite the wall she was by

and looked outside, grabbing a grape and eating it.
>
"Oh, what idiots! Morons! That's who I have working for me! Morons! Gods damn this whole thing to Tartarus!"
>
Obviously nobody has told him about me yet...
>
Xena cleared her throat to draw Pompey's attention.
>
He turned around swiftly. When he found Xena there, a look of surprise came over his face, but a pleased smile replaced that soon.

>
"Xena?" he asked, walking over to her, "what are you doing here?" His eyes dropped from hers and took in the very sight of her.

>
"Just thought I'd drop by and say hello," she replied, shrugging a little.
>
He sat down next to her on the couch. "Might I say that you look...ravishing...in that dress?"
>
She smiled at him. "Mmm...why, thank you," she purred.

>
"Now, I know you're not here *just* to say hello."
>
She tilted her head. "I heard that you were looking for the scrolls of Urania. I've heard the story behind them...and I was wondering what your wish was going to be."
>
Pompey studied her carefully. "If I tell you, how do I know you won't try to stop me?"
>
She leaned closer to him, her hands resting on his chest so she could feel the throbbing beat of his heart. "I think I already know what you'll wish for, Pompey, and believe me, I would *never* dream of getting in your way. You'd be a greater ruler than Caesar ever would."
>
"How do you know that is my wish? What if it was...to have you? The most beautiful woman in the world? The woman Caesar himself can't have? What would you have to say about that?"
>
"Well...why waste a wish? If you wish for Caesar's demise...then you can have me and Caesar's throne both." She leaned even closer, lips inches away from his.
>
"What are you saying?" Pompey asked, raising an interested eyebrow.
>
She ran a hand down his armor, fingers tracing the patterns. "I came here to help you find the scrolls, and make sure that your wish is a good one...and if it is...you'll be getting rid of my greatest enemy...and I'll be forever grateful...I might even then feel obliged to...oh...I don't know...make some of your wildest dreams come true?"

>
Pompey smiled, but suspicion crept into his features. "How do I know you aren't lying to me?"
>
She picked up a grape from the bowl and fingered it idly. "You'll just have to take that chance, right?" She offered the fruit to him, holding it to his lips.
>
He looked up to her eyes hesitantly, and then took the grape from her fingers with his teeth, eating it, and then pausing to suck her finger into his mouth after the grape. "Right... But...I think I'd be more...convinced...if you...did something to prove...yourself to me now." A feral grin crossed his face.
>
"What do you have in mind?" she purred.
>
"Oh...I think you already know the an--"
>
Xena pushed him deeper into the couch, her lips melding with his, her tongue running over his, effectively cutting off his last remark.
>
Pompey grinned inwardly. He'd been waiting for this forever.
>
He deepened the kiss hungrily and pushed her down on the bed.

>
Xena's head shot up as she heard someone clear their throat. With Pompey lowering his head to kiss her neck, she looked over to the window to find Ares standing there, a deadly expression on his face.

>
Ares, invisible to all but her, spoke, a poisonous edge in his voice, "I said *seduce* Pompey. Does that require making love to him? No! Why didn't you just pull away, keep him wanting you! Like you so effectively do to me? Believe me, that works, too! Must I be the only man you constantly frustrate?"

>
Xena grinned at him sweetly, but shrugged a little, pulling away from Pompey.

>
"Ah, ah, ah," she said, waving a taunting finger in front of him. "Not so fast. First, you find the scrolls and make the wish. Only then do you get me, alright?"

>
For a moment he looked angered, but calmed himself down somewhat before saying with clenched teeth, "Fine. But after that...you are *mine*."

>
Xena nodded and stood up, walking towards the door. Ares, with a triumphant grin on his face, joined her, curling an arm around her waist as they walked out the door together.

>
Only when safely in her room did she dare to look at him, lest somebody think she was seeing things. She sighed, shaking her head, look at him with mock exasperation.

>
"What?" he asked. "It's not like you really wanted to go through with it, right?"

>
She shrugged, a sly smile on her face, as she decided to annoy him a bit. "Well, I don't know...I thought it might have been fun."

>
He glared at her. "Give me a break...why in Tartarus would you want Pompey when *I'm* waiting in your room?"

>
"Hey, at least he isn't a pompous, self-centered, moronic, arrogant guy like you!"

>
Ares scoffed. "All those words fit him, Xena, and you know it!"

>
She shrugged again, smiling at the god. "You're right. But they do apply to you, too."

>
"Oh, but I can think of some other words and phrases that apply to me that could never apply to him..." Ares said.

>
"Like what?" Xena asked, already sure she knew the answer.

>
"Hmm...well...sexy... great in bed..." he stepped closer to her, leaning forward to whisper the last words in her ear, "hopelessly devoted to you."

>
His whisper sent shivers down her spine, and made the hair on her arms rise. She carefully stepped around him, and lowered herself down on the bed, a 'come and get me' look on her face.

>
Ares crawled onto the bed to meet her.

>
However, she didn't let him get past the foot of the bed, for she shot out her foot and placed it on his chest, stopping him from coming closer.

>
"Actually, I think I changed my mind. Oh well." She turned over on the bed to lay on her stomach.

>
Ares bit his tongue to keep the frustrated words from escaping his lips. Very well. If she wanted to continue to play this way, then he could handle it...for a while.

>
Until then, all he could do was lay down next to her, wrapping his arms around her waist, knowing she wouldn't mind. With one last glance down at his temptress, he closed his eyes and let Morpheus take him.

>
~*~

>
When she woke up, Ares was still there. She had barely slept last night, feeling every inch of Ares in the bed with her. She had held back all night. Her hurt feelings getting in the way mostly. Her body was saying yes. Her head was saying no. Xena knew she was at a crossroads. She had to make a decision one way or the other as to what she wanted. So muttering to herself she said, "Into the fire I go," and began running her hands over his chest, settling behind his neck, and she leaned her head forward to kiss him.

>
He grinned, and hungrily moved to meet her lips.

>
She hesitated and pulled away, a sly smile on her face. "Oh, no. I'm not that easy. So, how long have you been up?"

>
He glared hotly at her. "Oh, I've been up for awhile."

>
She shifted positions so she was sitting on the edge of the bed now. "Oh?" she queried, standing up and walking to stand in front of a large mirror.

>
"What do you want from me Xena? Blood?" he ground out.

>
He thought to himself, Ok I'll go along with her little game. For a little while at least...

>
To her he said, "So what do you plan on doing today?"

>
"Pompey was going to have a party. Well...not really a party, just a gathering of all the soldiers and people in the ballroom. He wants me to be there in a beautiful - though to him beautiful would probably mean scanty - dress. So I'll have to be there. Later on today I'm going to have him show me the map, and how much security he has on it. And when all is figured out, tomorrow night I will go and get the map, and we'll get out of here."

>
"Always so far ahead," murmured Ares to himself.

>
She heard it, and grinned at him. "I learn from the best."

>
He returned the compliment with a smile, and stood up. In his hands was a two-piece dress. (Well, I guess it wasn't really a dress then, but oh well.) The bottom was a loose skirt that went down to her knees in the front, and down to her ankles in the back. The sides got longer from front to back very gradually. The top looked to Xena like just a small, skinny stretch of fabric, just wide enough to cover her breasts, but nothing much more.

>
"I don't think so!" Xena said quickly.

>
"Oh, come on! There was a time when you'd wear this before, so why not now?"

>
"You misunderstood me." Xena said, looking from the 'dress' to him. "I would have worn anything, any color, on any given day for you... But I will *not* wear that...that..." she wagged a finger at the dress, "for Pompey."

>
He grinned widely at that, and gave in easily. "As you wish, my enchantress." In his hands appeared another dress, but this time it was an actual dress. It was made of the softest red silk with wide straps and a long skirt that would mold perfectly to her body.

>
"Better," Xena said. "Pompey probably would rather me wear something more showing...but not as showing as that other thing!...but *this* will do nicely for *me*."

>
He was looking at her, expecting her to undress in front of him and put it on.

>
"Uh...you're looking kind of...expectant there, Ares...I think I'll have you turn around," she said, grabbing the dress from him.

>
He pouted, but too tired of talking to argue the point, he turned.

>
Xena grinned. She had him around her little finger, and that was obvious. Slipping the other dress off, she put the new red one on. Reaching for the brush on the dresser, she said, " You can turn back around."

>
He did so, and moving to stand behind her, took the brush from her hands, and started brushing her long dark hair.

>
"Hmm...your hair smells like it was spun from the Gods." His long brush strokes were seductively soothing to her. When he was finished, he looked into the mirror to find her eyes closed.

>
"I know I can make you close your eyes by giving you a massage, but with brushing your hair? Hmm, you must be desperate," he said playfully, setting the brush aside and wrapping his arms around her waist, pulling her so that she leaned against him. Looking at the image of them in the mirror, he bent down and whispered in her ear, "Don't you feel it, Xena? We're perfect for each other. Don't you see that sparkle in your eyes? It's never there when I'm not around..."

>
She looked at the mirror, making eye contact with him. "I never said we aren't perfect for each other, did I? I agree with you totally. But we're 'enemies'. And you're a god and I'm a mortal. We can't have a relationship."

>
"We'll never be enemies, Sweetheart. How did we make it through those ten years? How can you tell me we can't have a relationship? WE HAD A RELATIONSHIP!" he bellowed.

>
She sighed. "You just don't understand..."

>
"You're right. I don't." He disappeared.

>
~*~

>
Pompey chuckled quietly at a comment made by one of the soldiers, and looked over at Xena, who was sitting leisurely on the other side of the couch/bed. She was talking to another guy, feeding him grapes and drinking wine. Too much wine, as far as Pompey was concerned. Even he knew she didn't drink this much; somebody had obviously spiked her first drink.

>
The soldier was on his back, and Xena plopped a grape in his mouth, almost choking him. When he finally swallowed, he joined in her laughing. A man went up to him a moment later, and whispered to him. He looked at Xena apologetically, obviously explaining that he had to leave. Pompey heard Xena shout after him, "You'd shhhure as hell better come back soon, Jeronius! I'll's a be comin' after yous, if you don't!" She giggled drunkenly, waving at the soldier.

>
Pompey sighed. She had had way too much wine. "Xena!" he called to her, interrupting the man talking to him in mid-sentence.

>
She looked up and around, not sure where the voice came from.

>
"Xena, over here!"

>
Her eyes finally landed on Pompey, who was beckoning her over to him. She scooted over to him, and he put his arm around her lower waist, motioning for her to lean her head on his shoulder.

>
"Xena, I suggest you don't drink any more of that," he said tiredly.

>
"What are yas talkin' abouts? I've hardly drinken a drop," she argued, calling a servant over for another glass.

>
~*~

>
Xena slammed shut the door of her room loudly.
>
"Man, what a parrrrty!" she yelled out to no one in particular. Sitting down at the edge of her bed, she reached over for the bowl of fruit on her bedside table. She took a peach and bit into it hungrily.

>
Looking around the room, she noticed the black cat making its way over to her from the windowsill.

>
"Heya, cutie! C'mon oh ver and lemme petcha!" Xena said, slapping a hand on her thigh.

>
The cat sat itself down right in front of her. "Get a hold on yourself, Xena!" it warned.

>
The peach fell from Xena's hand. "You - you can tallllk ?"

>
"Yes, I can," it answered. "My name is Astralique. I'm here to help you get the map from Pompey. I'm a servant of Urania."

>
Suddenly, Xena's hair stood on end, and Astralique noticed this.

>
"I'll explain everything tomorrow," the cat whispered, so as only Xena could hear. That said, it ran back across the room and jumped onto the window sill. It stood there, watching her.

>
Ares appeared moments later, right in front of her.

>
Xena stood up, pushing past him. She pointed a finger at the cat. "It - it talked! That - that thingy-ma-hic talks!" she said, momentarily losing part of her vocabulary.

>
Ares looked at her, trying not to laugh. "Sweet, I never knew you to get drunk...at least not without me there, anyway. I really think you overdid it!"

>
Xena glared at him, lips pouting. "Yous don't bee leave me?! You lout! You pig! I thought you had faith in me, here!"

>
Ares laughed. "I have complete faith in you, Xena, just not when you're drunk! Somebody spike your wine or somethin'?"

>
"Fine! You're not gettin' any tonight!" Xena yelled at him, ignoring his question and throwing herself down on the bed, covering herself up with the blanket, even her head.

>
Ares stood there for a moment, laughing quietly, and then moved to sit on the bed next to her covered-up body. "Xena, if you don't stop this childishness, I'm going to leave."

>
"Fine! See if I care!"

>
He shook his head and shrugged. She was even beautiful drunk.

But making love to a drunken Warrior Princess wasn't his style, so he leaned over to kiss what he figured was her shoulder, then he stood up and disappeared.

>
~*~

>
Xena woke up with a hangover. Not the worse that she's ever had, for it was only wine, and really not *that* many glasses...But she still had this baffling feeling.

>
Getting up, she sat on the edge of the bed, hunched over.

>
From a chair in the corner, Ares laughed.

>
Her head whipped up and glared in his direction. "I thought I told you to go away. Even drunk I remember that much," she mumbled.

>
He shrugged. "I got bored. So kill me," he said, a smile tweaking his lips.

>
"Yeah, well I'm really grumpy, and I suggest you move it or lose an arm...or some another vital body part you hold extremely dear."

>
"Is that wine still messing with your head? I'm a god, Xena."

>
She rolled her eyes. "Oh just shut up, would you?"
>
"What, would you like me to be sympathetic? I can you know. I mean, I've gone through a hangover before. You were there, remember?" he chuckled.

>
"The last thing that *I* want is *your* sympathy," she ground out.

>
He shook his head. "Sure, sure. Anyway, you'd better hurry up if you want to stay on your *perfect* schedule, my dear. It's well past midday."

>
She cursed, jumping up. "Come on, I need something to wear, don't take all day."

>
He waved his hand, and she once again looked fully groomed with a new dress and hair brushed. "At last, you're focused again. And to think that last night you were ranting about a talking cat!"

>
"I could've sworn it talked," she muttered, walking to the door. "This had better not take long, or else I know somebody is gonna end up without a head... I need more sleep, and if I don't get it soon, somebody's gonna pay..."

>
~*~

>
"My men are digging as we speak, my dear," Pompey answered.

>
"It's been taking so long. Maybe you're digging at the wrong place. Can I see the map?" she asked innocently.

>
He looked at her warily for a moment, and then relented.

"Alright. Come with me."

>
He led her down a corridor, to a room with a canopied something-or-other in the middle. Walking over to it, he took out a key, putting it in a small keyhole, and opening a panel. A rope hung in the small niche, and he pulled on it.

>
"That disables the bells," he explained. "If I didn't do that, then when I pulled on the cords to move the curtains, it would set off an alarm and the whole castle would think somebody was stealing it."

>
Now he opened the curtains, revealing the map. Xena reached to grab it, but Pompey stopped her.

>
"Hold on a minute. Look closely," he said.

>
She did. "I don't see anything."

>
"Spider-thread silk. Another precaution. Only this key I have allow you to disable the bells, which ring if you move the curtains or touch the silk. But they're off now, so you can go ahead and get the map out."

>
She suddenly thought about what had happened the first time she met Autolycus when they had gone to get that chest. Holding back a chuckle, she took the map in her hands, pretending to study it. But in her mind she was devising a plan to get the map out of the room.

>
~*~

>
Xena silently made her way down the hallway. When she reached the door to the room with the map, she hesitated. "Hmm...I wonder if Pompey has rigged this to make bells ring if I open the door," she mused, laughing to herself quietly. She opened the door, and no bells ringing, she slipped into the room.

>
The room was pitch-black, but torches lined the walls, and she lit them with the one in her hand. That done, she looked up at the ceiling.

>
Taking a long rope from the bag she had brought, she swung it around. Letting it go, it went up into the air and came back down again, but caught on a beam. Taking the other end in her hands, she

looked around, trying to find something that would at least hold the rope down.

>
Ares appeared, an amused expression on his face. "Didn't think it through entirely?"

>
"Oh, I did, I just thought I'd be able to use something that was in here earlier...but he cleared out the room," Xena said in defense.

>
"Ah. Well, for your effort, I suppose I'll hold the rope for you," he said, taking one end of it.

>
She nodded curtly, slightly bothered that her plan didn't work fully. She took the other end in both hands and started to climb.

>
When she was there, she treaded lightly at first, making sure that the beam would hold her weight. When she was sure it would, she took another rope from her bag. The bells were right beside her, and with the rope, she secured them.

>
Looking down to make sure Ares was still there, and finding that he was, she started her descent. When she reached the bottom, she tugged on the rope, causing it to fall down. She threw it back into her bag, and made her way towards the map.

>
She glanced back at Ares, and then to the task at hand. Taking a deep breath, but making sure not to let him see her uneasiness, she carefully opened one the curtains.

>
And the ringing of bells ensued.

>
She cursed loudly, and grabbing her bag, ran out the door, but not without a glare at a smirking Ares.

>
He laughed. Waving his hand, he made the rope on the bells disappear, and then he himself vanished.

>
Neither one of them had noticed the black cat behind the canopy that held the map.

>
~*~

>
"Who is the thief?" Pompey asked angrily.

>
"It was nothing sir," the lieutenant answered. "The only thing we saw there was a black cat. The map was still there, and nothing looked as if it had been touched."

>
Pompey looked around suspiciously for a moment, and then stood up. Walking down the hall to Xena's room, the lieutenant followed him. Pompey waved his hand in dismissal, and the man left.

>
No bothering to knock, Pompey reached to open the door, but it opened itself, and Xena stepped out, armor on.

>
"What was all that ringing about?" she asked innocently.

>
He studied her carefully, and then finally said, "Something set off the alarm. When my men got there, we only found a cat. She must have brushed against the curtains or the silk."

>
"So, it was a false alarm? Nothing to stay up and discuss?"

>
"Right. Go back to bed, Xena."

>
"Okay. Goodnight, Pompey," she said, and retreated to her room.

>
When the door shut behind her, Pompey shook his head. "But the question, Xena, is how the cat got in there in the first place..."

>
~*~

>
Xena took her armor and leathers off and sat back down on the bed. Leaning on her hands, she closed her eyes, resting for a moment.

>
Ares appeared as soon as her eyelids shut, laughing.

>
"Ooh, princess, not so high-and-mighty, are we?" Ares asked.

>
"Shut up," she said, malice in her words.

>
He silenced suddenly as she opened her eyes, showing a dark fire in them. Cautiously, he walked to her and sat down beside her, his hands coming up to rest on her shoulders.

>
"I was just teasing; lighten up, my dear," Ares said, starting to massage her.

>
She pulled away from him viciously, walking over to the window.

>
He sat there for a moment, knowing from years of experience that the only way to get her to act normal was to either be silent and let her cool off, or say something clever that would melt away hardness on her features.

>
He chose the first, not feeling up to a game of words. He sighed, wishing he hadn't have made the comment he did when he appeared.

>
Xena looked out the window, still furious that her plan had not worked. Her eyes took in the full moon, and the stars shining brightly. The jungle, with the night animals, hooting and howling. The beautiful flowers that were at the edge of the jungle, near her window. She took a deep breath, taking in the aroma of the humid air filled with smell of flowers and incense.

>
She glanced back into the room, taking in the sight of Ares, sitting on the bed, looking down at his hands, shifting position uncomfortably. She suddenly noticed something she hadn't noticed before. His hair was short. He'd cut his hair for her. She sighed, and her heart melted a bit.

>
Walking back over to the bed, she sat down next to him again.

>
He looked up at her, searching her eyes to see if she was still angry.

>
She stared into his eyes for a moment, and then broke the gaze, shifting it to his hair. "How long has it been short?" she asked him.

>
"What? My hair? Well, it was like this when I was holding the rope for you... I was wondering if you noticed or not." He looked into her eyes.

>
"I like It. It looks good," she said, raising her hand and running her fingers through it. Her fingers rested at the back of his neck, massaging it a little. "A very nice improvement. Very nice indeed."

>
Ares sighed dramatically, as if he was exasperated. "Well, does it look sexy enough for you, or not?"

>
"Oh, believe me, you are hot. You look simply edible with your hair like that. Did you even have to ask?"

>
"Of course I did. I have to keep my princess pleased, don't I?" Ares said huskily, his hands finding their way around her waist.

>
She looked down at them, and then back up into his eyes. "Take me somewhere... Somewhere beautiful in India."

>
"Your presence turns the darkest cavern beautiful, Xena." He groaned.

>
She smiled at his flattery. "Let's go to...the ocean?"

>
"Alright," Ares said. "It isn't far from here, anyway."

>
Xena's hand came down from his neck and she laid it gently in his big hand. In the blink of an eye, they were at a beach, the waves crashing against the rocks.

>
Leading him down to the edge, Xena sat down, swishing her

fingers through the water slowly.

>
With a thought, his vest disappeared, and he sat down next to her. "Care for a swim, milady?"

>
"No thank you. I think tonight I prefer to watch the waves, not become one with them."

>
Ares smiled, slipping a hand around her lower waist, and turning his head to kiss her shoulder.

>
She pulled away slightly to look up at him. "Gods, you look gorgeous," she breathed unthinkingly.

>
He smiled, pulling her closer. "I'm glad you like it."

>
"Mmm," she mumbled in agreement, her head moving to rest on his shoulder. She closed her eyes, telling part of herself to forget all reason, and stay in his arms forever.

>
Soon, her eyelids grew heavy, and she drifted off to sleep.

>
Ares looked down at her, and with a flick of his wrist they were back on her bed. He laid her down as carefully as he could, but her eyes opened again.

>
"Ares-" she began, but he lifted his fingers to her lips.

>
"Shh," he whispered. "Go back to sleep..."

>
She obeyed him, and her eyes closed once more, again safe in Morpheus' arms.

>
He softly kissed her forehead, and then stood up, blowing out the candles that were still lit. That done, he laid down next to her, and, wrapping an arm around her, joined her in the Dream World.

>
~*~

>
Xena awoke to the purr of a cat and the kneading of it's claws on her bodice. She opened her eyes, but sunlight spilling over them, shut them again quickly. She sat up, and noticing a hand around her waist, knew that Ares had not left. She opened her eyes, looking down at him.

>
"Ares?" she said, shaking him.

>
His eyes opened, taking in the sight of her. "I'd love to wake up to that face every morning," he whispered.

>
She smiled. "Perhaps you will..."

>
He shook his head, sitting up. "In this lifetime?"

>
"You never know..."

>
~*~

>
Xena spent the rest of the day trying not to laugh as Ares, invisible to all but her, made faces and pantomime at the Romans, particularly Pompey, whom to which he seemed to hold a grudge.

>
That night, Xena and Ares were lying in bed laughing. They clinked glasses, and practically downed the wine in them with two gulps. Tossing the glasses aside and laughing for no reason really (which was an effect of so much wine), Ares leaned over and kissed her gently. Pulling away and seeing the drunk, lustful expression on her face, he grinned, chuckling, and then kissed her again. This time there was a savage passion in his kiss, his tongue forcing her mouth to accept him, she returning the passion. They stayed locked in a sort of duel, he nipping her lips till they were swollen, and she sucking him deeper into her pliant mouth.

>
Xena's left hand went up to rest behind his neck, while her right slipped into his vest. She kissed him passionately, trying to desperately to remember what it felt like to make love to him in the old days, but found only a blank, for the wine had once again gone to her head.

>
Ares' didn't care that they were both intoxicated. He because of his smoldering desire for the woman so pliant in his arms, and she from the wine. He hadn't meant to get her drunk. But they were having such a wonderful time it never occurred to him to stop her.

>
Oh gods, he thought, as the heated feeling of rapture started coursing through his body. Their tongues and mouths danced an age old dance, their hands roamed freely across the plains of each others bodies. Before either of them knew what was happening, their clothes vanished, and everything had gone too far...

>
~*~

>

>Pompey stormed down the hallway, a long dagger in his hand. It was daybreak, and a soldier just told him about an incident that had happened right after he went to sleep. It seemed that the man heard someone scream in Xena's room. When he'd tried to open the door, it was locked, and had no reply when he banged on the door. Pompey was sure he knew what was going on.

>Quickly making his way to Xena's bedroom, he burst inside.

>And there it was.

>Xena was sleeping, a man curled around her, head resting on her shoulder. He was also asleep. Their naked bodies were covered with a black sheet, far enough up to cover Xena's breasts and the man's waist. A wine bottle, glasses, and roses were strewn about on the floor.

>Hot rage consumed him. She'd been with another man after promising to be his!

>Not able to think clearly, he took the only form of action he could. Making his way over to the bed, he grabbed Xena's sleeping form, yanking her out of the bed, and forcing her to stand, the dagger at her throat. She was still half-asleep, not even able to analyze the situation yet.

>The movement of her body had caused the man to awake, and he looked up with sleepy eyes. Studying the spectacle for a moment, his eyes suddenly widened, fully awake and alert. He eyed the dagger at her throat.

>Pompey shook Xena awake. Finally, her eyes opened completely, and she took in a sharp breath, realizing what was happening.

>"Pompey," she said calmly, "what do you think you're doing?"

>"What am *I* doing?" he asked incredulously. "What are *you* doing? How dare you have another man in here when you pledged that you'd be mine!"

>Xena looked over at Ares, just seeming to realize what had happened. She looked down at her naked body, and then back at Ares. She closed her eyes for a moment, and the room seemed to get smaller and smaller.

>"I - I...this was a mistake, Pompey. I never meant for this to happen," she said finally, opening her eyes.

>Ares had been watching silently, and decided to speak. "Let her go, Pompey." His tone deadly.

>"No!" he shouted, pushing the blade closer to her neck.

>She swallowed hard, her eyes beckoning for Ares to use his powers and do *something* to Pompey - anything.

>He nodded to her, understanding. He raised his hand to make Pompey disappear...and nothing happened.

>He waved his hand again.

>Nothing.

>Panic ensued him. "Let her go, Pompey. This wasn't her fault. Let

her go!" he said, trying to keep his voice in neutral. He stood, the sheet falling from him.

>Xena took in a breath so sharp that it hurt.

>"Let her go," Ares repeated.

>"One step closer and...she dies!" Pompey threatened.

>Ares stopped in mid-step.

>"Ares," Xena said. "Just *go*, alright? You don't have your powers; you can't do anything here. Stay and he'll probably kill you. Get out."

>"No."

>"Go!"

>Ares shook his head stubbornly.

>She was about to protest again, but out of nowhere, a black cat jumped on Pompey's shoulder with a shriek and hiss, clawing his face.

>He let go of Xena and dropped the dagger, trying to get the cat off of him before it tore apart his face. He flung the demon from his shoulders, and it landed on the bed, back arched, hair on end.

>Xena, already beside Ares and away from Pompey, looked at the Roman. Blood was everywhere, five claw marks scratched across his face.

>He ran out of the room, calling for his soldiers and guard.

>The cat meowed for attention. The two looked over at it.

>"Get some clothes on," it said.

>They gasped.

>The cat seemed to sigh. "I said get some clothes on. I'm a servant of Urania, and I'm here to help you. My name is Astralique. Now *hurry*!"

>They obediently got dressed in their leathers, and armed themselves with their swords, and Xena with her chakram.

>"Now what?" asked Ares?

>"Do you have your powers back yet?" Astralique asked.

>He tried to use them. "No."

>"Alright then. Do you think you can fight?"

>Xena looked over at Ares uncertainly. Not uncertain if he could fight, but uncertain if she could. The wine had given her a headache, and all of last night's activities had left her very much fatigued.

>"Don't worry, Sweetheart, you'll be alright," Ares said reassuringly. "You can do it."

>"Okay, you both can fight. Now, we have to get the map out of here. Let's go!"

>The cat ran down the hallway to the map room, Ares and Xena right behind her.

>The bells started ringing as Xena reached through the curtains and grabbed the map, folding it and putting down in her cleavage.

>"Let's get out of here!" she said, turning for the door.

>Twenty soldiers appeared there before they could get out. Ares ran to meet them, easily downing at least six of them in fifteen seconds. Xena sighed, and ran to meet some of the others, her sword flying.

>They fought for a minute, side by side, and Ares looked over at her. Her reactions were coming seconds too late, and more than once she almost got a sword in her side.

>I don't know if she can make it...

>Another soldier rushed to fight her as the others fell to the

ground. She fought with him, gasping for breath.

>Ares took care of the rest of his quickly and grabbed a dagger from his boot. Faster than a blink, he threw it, and it embedded itself into the soldier's back. He fell to his knees in front of Xena, and then to the floor, dead.

>She looked up at Ares with an unspoken 'thank you' in her eyes.

>He nodded to her. "Let's get out of here, my Princess."

>~~~

>After meeting more soldiers at the front gate, they were running through the woods, Astralique beside them. Finally, Xena couldn't stand it anymore, and her legs gave way as she made it to a nearby boulder. She leaned on it, gasping for breath.

>Ares turned back, seeing that she was no longer with him, and ran to her. He leaned on the rock also, panting.

>"I - think - we - lost them," he said, breathless. He tiredly put a hand loosely around her waist, pulling her closer for a moment, kissing the top of her head. "You made it, Sweetheart."

>She nodded, still trying to catch breath. Both had seemed to forget what had happened last night.

>They heard a rustle in the trees. Before they knew what had happened, there were eight soldiers in front of and behind them.

>Ares looked over at Xena, afraid she might tire in the middle of the fight. He drew his sword, and almost dropped it, for it felt so heavy in his hands. Wiping the sweat from his brow and taking one last deep breath, he rushed forward at the soldiers.

>Watching him, Xena almost laughed, despite how much it all hurt. "He has a lot of energy, my god of war does..."

>She ran to fight the soldiers behind them. Four for her, and four for Ares. She could handle that, couldn't she?

>She downed all three soldiers, but the last was tougher. Ares was fighting with more that had come to join, and she could here more a little ways off into the jungle.

>We're not going to make it.

>The soldier's arm sprang out, and her reflexes being slow, the man's fist connected with her temple, throwing her to the ground. She hit her head on the boulder, and it knocked her unconscious.

>Ares, disposing of the man he was currently fighting, only to find two more coming to play with him, spared a glance to see how Xena was faring.

>His heart leapt into his throat. She was on the ground...unconscious. The man responsible for this was towering above her, prepared to drive the blade into her chest.

>Chaotic thoughts went through his head, and in the blink of an eye, the soldiers were gone, each replaced with a pile of dust.

>He blinked, and waved his hand. The piles of dust disappeared! He had his powers back!

>He sighed quickly in relief, walking to Xena and kneeling beside her. She was out cold. He picked her up in his arms, and walked her to a nearby riverbank, just beyond the trees. Laying her down gently, he sat down beside her.

>His thoughts began to wander as he waited, and finally landed on Astralique. Where was she?

>He looked around. Finally, he saw her, lying in a heap near the trees. Blood covered much of her body.

>He knelt down beside her. "Astralique?"

>The cat opened her eyes. "I'm...okay... Where's Xena? Does she have the map?"

>"She's unconscious, and yes, she does have the map." He paused, looking the animal over. "Are you alright?"

>She nodded weakly. "I'll be a lot better when Xena wakes up though, and we can go to Urania. She can heal me."

>Ares studied her again. "Well...until then, should I clean the wound?"

>The cat nodded again.

>Ares picked her up gingerly, and walked back over to where Xena lay. He laid her back down, and a cloth appeared in his hands. Dipping it in the cool river water, he cleaned her wound.

>When he was finished, he pet her coat lightly. "Are you sure you'll be okay?"

>"Yes. Why does this question seem to plague you so?"

>Ares shifted uncomfortably. "Well...you saved her life, Astralique. Pompey - he would have killed her. And I wouldn't have been able to do anything. Thank you. You saved her."

>"Her well being seems to mean more to you than your own life. You could have been killed too. That wine put a suspense on your god hood, and you were mortal for hours. You could have died as well."

>"In the scheme of things, my feline friend, her life is much more meaningful than mine. I would die *for* her; I would die to *protect* her. If she sincerely asked me to drive the hind's blood dagger into my heart, I think I would do it in a moment."

>"It sounds like you really love her," Astralique said.

>Ares looked down at the grass suddenly and swallowed hard. He shifted his eyes to look to the cat, and then closed them. "Yeah. Yeah, I do. I...love...her." He looked over at Xena's unconscious body, reaching his hand to caress her face. "Why was I ever so stupid as to get her into this?" His fingers lightly grazed her bruised temple. "She should be up in a couple minutes though..."

>So there they waited, by her side, until her eyes fluttered open.

>At first, everything was a blur, and she blinked rapidly for a moment. But when everything cleared, she looked up to see the concerned face of Ares.

>"Now that's a sight for sore eyes," she murmured.

>He grinned. "Are you alright, Princess?"

>She rubbed her temple. "I - I think so..."

>He stood up and offered her his hand. She took it in a firm hold and he lifted her to her feet. Their eyes met for a moment, and they gazed at one another.

>Xena pulled away suddenly, averting her eyes. "Ooookay," she said, walking away from him a good distance. "So, what do we do now?"

>Ares watched her step away, a slightly troubled frown on his face. "We're...uh...going to give the map to Urania. That is, if you're ready to go?"

>Xena nodded. "Yeah...sure."

>He picked up Astralique, and then held out his hand for Xena to take so that they could step into the ether. She hesitated, uncomfortable, and then took it. They appeared in Urania's palace, where they saw her pacing, running a troubled hand through her shoulder-length black hair. Xena stepped away from Ares as soon as she knew that they were there.

>Urania looked up as they stepped from the ether, and seeing Astralique, she gasped. "Astralique!" She ran over to Ares, taking her cat from his hands, and sat her down on a table. "Astralique, are you alright?"

>"Yes, my goddess. If you could just heal this wound..."

>Urania nodded, placing her hands on the feline's wound. Closing her eyes, a ball of bright golden light surrounded her hands and the wound was gone. "Better?" she asked, smiling at her follower.

>"Yes. Thank you, my goddess."

>Urania nodded, and turned to Ares. "Did you get the map?"

>He smiled at her. "My best warrior got it for me." He looked over at Xena.

>Xena shifted, looking away from him.

>"Urania, this is Xena. Xena, Urania," Ares introduced.

>"Thank you, Xena, for getting the map back."

>Xena nodded, and retrieved the map from between her breasts. She handed it to Urania. "You really should get more loyal followers," she muttered.

>Urania laughed softly as she took the map. "I agree."

>Urania held the map out in front of her, concentrating. Suddenly, the room was filled with a bright golden light as the map exploded into thousands of tiny pieces.

>Urania looked back at them. "Well now, that's taken care of. How could I ever thank you for what you've done, Xena?"

>"Just your words of gratitude are enough, Urania. There is no need for any more." Xena looked over at Ares. "I need to get back now."

>Ares nodded, studying her features. "As you wish, my Princess." He walked over to Urania, giving her a kiss on the cheek. "If you have any more problems, you know who to call."

>~~~

>As soon as they appeared back on the battlefield where they had first started this quest, Xena stepped away from him quickly. "Well, I should go now. Gabrielle might be worried." She turned and started to walk away.

>Ares just stood there, wondering what he could say. He finally ran to catch up with her, grabbing her upper arm firmly. "Stop, Xena."

>She stopped, turning to look at him. "What do you want?" she asked through clenched teeth, blinking back tears that threatened to fall.

>He gazed into her eyes, seeing the betrayed look in them.

>Quietly, he said, "Xena, I'm sorry. I -"

>She turned away from him. "Just leave me alone, Ares. Please... Just stay out of my life." Not even glancing back, she walked away down the valley.

>Ares nodded regretfully, and whispered, trying to hold back his own tears, "As you wish, my Princess. As you wish." He stood there, watching her walk away from him for the thousandth time. But he knew she wasn't coming back. This had been their last adventure.

>Xena walked on, unwanted tears streaming down her face. She wiped them away with a shaky hand, and kept on. A soft wind caressed her face, and rustled the birds in the trees, resulting in cheerful chirping. Xena took a deep breath, trying to straighten things out in her head. He'd gotten her drunk...he must have done so on purpose. He had good reason too, for she was denying him in the cruelest way. So he'd gotten her drunk and made love to her when she was in a delirious daze.

>She held back a sob. She'd trusted him that time. She'd been flirting with him since the whole ordeal with Pompey began. But she'd

never meant it to go that far. Not that far.

>She closed her eyes, listening to the sounds of the morning. She'd felt something for him...she'd really felt something for him...and he'd betrayed her.

>No...perhaps the wine was still going to her head...what if she was blowing things way out of proportion? What if he had an explanation?

>She opened her eyes. Why hadn't she just listened to him?

>She stopped in mid-step. She debated in her head whether she *really* wanted to turn back. Finding that she did, she hesitated, and then turned around slowly. To her surprise Ares was still standing there, where she had left him, about seventy-five yards back, watching her.

>She swallowed. Gathering all the courage she could muster, she took a deep breath, wiped her eyes, and silently walked back to him. As she neared him, he stayed where he was, as if not wanting to make yet another wrong move.

>She finally reached him, stopping to stand in front of him.

>He stayed quiet, waiting for her to speak first.

>Seeing this, she finally mumbled, "Why? Why did you do that to me?"

>He looked her in the eyes. "Xena, we were both drunk. You know I didn't mean for that to happen."

>"Like hell you didn't!" she said. "You wanted me, but I kept pushing you away, so you did that. I don't know...how...you ever could have gone that far, but you did."

>"Xena, listen to me! I was drunk too! I didn't know what was going on! And even drunk, I would never rape you, so you obviously had to be just as much into it as I was! Do you think that I don't feel? That I don't get the same urges and desires you do? By the gods Xena, even drunk you are an enticing being. I would have to be dead not to respond to you. I'm sorry you feel the way you do. But I'm not sorry it happened. Those were the best hours of my existence. I'll not trade the memory of you in my arms for anything. Hate me if you will. I'm used to that," his voice cracked a bit, almost as if he was holding back.... What? Tears?

>She turned her back on him, tears forming at her eyes again.

>He looked down at the ground, cursing himself. "Listen I'm sorry, Xena. I'm sorry I hurt you. I shouldn't have asked you to take on this task in the first place. I could have had somebody else do it. I'm sorry. I'll leave you alone if you really want me to. But I'll not regret the love we shared. Not even for you, my Princess. I'll not forget." His voice cracked again.

>She turned back to face him. For a moment they just stood there. Time seemed to freeze, the birds quieted, the breeze stopped. Only the sun seemed to be doing anything, beating down on them, causing the tension to seem really thick.

>And then...Xena threw her arms around his neck.

>Ares sighed in deep relief, holding her close, running his fingers through her hair.

>"Oh, Xe, I'm sorry."

>She shook her head and placed her finger to his lips. "Let's not talk about that now, okay?"

>He nodded, and kissed her on the top of the head. He wrapped an arm around her shoulder, pulling her next to him. They continued walking through the valley in sweet silence.

>Xena broke it. "Well, I think I accomplished much in these past

days... I gave a goddess back her map...I saved Pompey's life...I got the god of war to cut his hair..."

>Ares laughed. "You always get your way with me..."

>She smiled, wrapping her hand around his waist loosely. As they continued to walk, she said, "Ares...what if..." Her fingers came up to graze her belly, looking down at it worriedly.

>He pulled her closer still. "I'll be here, Xena. You know I will."

>"You won't desert me?" she questioned.

>"Desert my Warrior Princess? That's one of the great sins that even I would never dare to commit." He chuckled.

>She grinned half-heartedly. "I'd better get back to Gabrielle. You'd better get going to do your thing."

>He nodded, removing his arm from her shoulder, and taking her hand. Kissing the smooth surface, he gave her a Cheshire cat grin. "I'll be here...always..."

>And with that he disappeared.

>A cool breeze flowed through the valley, and the birds sang once again. With a little shake of her head, she continued her walk, planning to rejoin her best friend in the next town...

>~*~

>THE END

> <p><p>

End
file.